

Brokerages drop the ball on leads: Real estate's costly follow-up problem

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By the experts at HomesUSA.com

When a prospective new homebuyer contacts a real estate brokerage and gets no response, how much does that missed opportunity cost the builder?

A new study from Pied Piper reveals widespread shortcomings in how major real estate brokerage brands handle incoming phone calls and website inquiries. The findings suggest that many brokerages are missing opportunities to connect with consumers who have already expressed an interest in speaking with an agent.

The study, as reported recently by Lillian Dickerson, "Brokerages drop the ball on most consumer phone, web inquiries" in *Real Estate News*, notes that nearly three out of four consumers who called a brokerage **received no follow-up within 24 hours**. Website inquiries performed even worse, with more than two-thirds receiving no response.

In contrast, builders using SpecDeck provided by the nation's largest new homes-only brokerage, HomesUSA.com automatically forwards buyer inquiries directly to builders in just one or two seconds, without waiting for an agent to take action.

SpecDeck's Automated Lead Capture and Forwarding technology doesn't depend on a listing agent to pass along buyer inquiries. Every phone call and email is captured automatically and immediately sent straight to the builder. Calls are instantly routed to the phone number the builder designates, and email inquiries are forwarded to as many as five email addresses of the builder's choosing. SpecDeck also integrates with major CRM platforms, so every buyer inquiry lands where the builder's team already works. All leads are kept for your reference and easily accessed and exported so none get overlooked.

Only one-third reach an agent

For its 2026 Lead Handling Effectiveness study, Pied Piper submitted 2,198 consumer inquiries by phone and through local office websites across 21 major real estate brands during June and July.

Researchers evaluated the speed and quality of initial responses and follow-up communications during the first 24 hours, assigning Lead Handling Effectiveness scores ranging from zero to 100.

The results exposed significant weaknesses in how brokerages handle prospective customers. Although 97% of telephone calls successfully connected to a brokerage office, only 53% of callers spoke with a representative in a timely manner. Just 33% actually reached a real estate agent during their initial call.

Perhaps most troubling, 73% of callers received no follow-up by telephone, text or email within the next 24 hours. That means most consumers who failed to connect with an agent initially could not count on the brokerage to reach out afterward.

For homebuilders, the consequences can be costly. Unless a builder has its own MLS account, inquiries about its listed homes will be forwarded by the listing agent. When that agent fails to act, the builder may never receive the inquiry or even know that a potential buyer expressed interest.

Website leads fare even worse

Consumers submitting inquiries through brokerage websites experienced even lower response rates.

According to Pied Piper, 68% of website inquiries received no response within 24 hours. Only 18% resulted in communication from an agent, and just 10% led to contact from an agent within the first hour.

The researchers also discovered that approximately one in 10 website inquiry forms did not function properly.

These failures are particularly significant because consumers submitting online inquiries have already taken an active step toward connecting with a brokerage.

Yet the average Lead Handling Effectiveness score for website inquiries was just 11 out of 100, compared with 30 out of 100 for telephone inquiries.

The results suggest that many brokerages have not established reliable processes for turning incoming consumer inquiries into conversations with agents.

Which brokerages performed best and worst?

Although the overall findings were disappointing, Pied Piper discovered substantial differences among the 21 major brokerage brands evaluated.

Howard Hanna Real Estate Services achieved the highest overall Lead Handling Effectiveness score at 30 out of 100, demonstrating that even the top-ranked company had considerable room for improvement.

Compass, ERA, Keller Williams and United Real Estate connected callers directly with an agent less than 25% of the time.

The differences reveal that some brokerages are substantially more effective than others at connecting prospective clients with agents.

Online inquiry response rates vary dramatically

The Pied Piper research also identified wide differences in how brokerage brands responded to website inquiries. RE/MAX, Realty One Group and Howard Hanna were among the best performers, responding to more than 60% of website inquiries within 24 hours. However, that means nearly two out of five potential buyers received no response after an entire day had passed.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Engel & Völkers, Realty Executives, Sotheby's International Realty and Long & Foster responded to fewer than 10% of online inquiries within that same period.

The industry average for responding to website inquiries within 24 hours was just 32%.

Consumers are left doing the follow-up

One of the study's most revealing findings involved what happened when callers could not reach an agent directly.

Rather than ensuring the agent contacted the consumer, brokerage representatives frequently provided an agent's name and telephone number, leaving the consumer responsible for making another call.

Pied Piper Vice President of Metrics and Analytics Cameron O'Hagan emphasized the consequences of delayed responses in the company's announcement, noting that unanswered calls and slow follow-up can allow consumers to connect with another agent before the original brokerage recognizes the missed opportunity.

A costly gap in brokerage lead management

For brokerages, the challenge goes beyond answering the telephone or maintaining a functioning website. It requires dependable systems, clear responsibility for responding to inquiries and consistent follow-up procedures.

The Pied Piper study demonstrates that many of the nation's largest real estate brands still struggle with those fundamentals.

And when consumers cannot reach an agent or receive a timely response, they have plenty of other brokerages to contact.

Source: Pied Piper, 2026 Lead Handling Effectiveness study, as reported by Lillian Dickerson, Real Estate News, Oct. 6, 2026.

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